

RI STATE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

2283 Hartford Avenue

Johnston, RI 02919

MEETING MINUTES

February 19, 2015

USDA-NRCS Conference Room

60 Quaker Lane, Warwick, RI 02886

Chair Maria Mack called meeting to order at 10:07.

Present:

RISCC Members: Maria Mack, Ken Ayars, Clarkson Collins, Paul Dolan, Emerson Wildes; RISCC Staff: Ramona LeBlanc; ERICD: Jessica Blackledge; NRICD: Gina DeMarco; SRICD: Kate Bousquet; RIACD: Dick Went, Jean Lynch; RI DEM: Bev Migliore; RI Statewide Planning: Paul Gonsalves; NRCS: Phou Vongkhamdy; Sanne Kure-Jensen, NOFA.

I. Minutes: A motion to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2014 and February 10, 2015 meetings was made by Paul Dolan, seconded by Ken Ayars. Motion passed unanimously.

II. Financial Reports: A motion that RISCC is in receipt of the financial reports was made by Clarkson Collins, seconded by Emerson Wildes. Motion carried unanimously.

III. New Business:

A. NOFA: Sanne Kure-Jensen discussed the mission of NOFA and invited the Districts to partner more closely with the organization, especially with participation in workshops. Districts will pursue opportunity to attend some events as part of 2015 Outreach agreement with NRCS. Organizations will move forward to develop an MOU, to be signed by NOFA, the Districts and either RISCC or RIACD.

B. Meetings with DEM: A small group had a second meeting with Deputy Director Cathy Sparks to discuss partnership between DEM and Districts. A follow-up meeting which will include NRCS and additional DEM staff will be held on February 26.

IV. Agreements:

A. Geese: Agreement has been extended. Three public workshops are scheduled and plans are underway for field season.

B. Traceability: Agreement will end on 3/31/15 and DEM is pursuing funds to continue.

C. Engineering: Working on two agreements concurrently. Engineering tech has projected that all assignments for both can be completed by 9/30/15. At the end of the quarter estimates will be reviewed to determine if they are accurate. At that point, it will be up to NRCS to decide whether to assign more tasks but keep original end date, which would require hiring additional RISCC engineering staff, or extending the performance period to allow one person to work for a longer period of time. A meeting will be scheduled for

early April to discuss. Hiring of additional staff will be tabled until after that discussion.

D. Outreach: 1st round of workshops is scheduled for March and will feature open house format. Plans for rest of agreement will be finalized after additional conversations with NRCS PAS regarding topics, public events, etc. Media consultant will be informed that RISCC will not use his services for this agreement. Rather, the Districts will implement some of his recommendations.

E. Engineering Handbook: Agreement ends 3/31/15 and assignments are nearing completion. Staff has been able to complete more of the handbook than NRCS originally anticipated. Final product will be posted on NRCS website.

F. Contractors List: Weather impacted training session held in January. Agreement scheduled to end 3/31/15 but funds will remain. RISCC will discuss amendment to extend performance period to allow more workshops to be held.

V. Old Business:

A. FFOS/NRCS Plans

1. NRCS wants to develop whole farm conservation plans but does not have staff time to do so. Phou will prioritize an agreement whereby District staff could write the plans. Since these plans will meet FFOS requirements Districts will continue to advise FFOS applicants that process is still under review and that a lower cost or no-cost option may be available in the future. Landowners not wanting to wait for that possible option can either choose to have the

Districts develop a plan for a fee or develop their own plan, subject to review and acceptance by District Board,

2. FFOS Subcommittee met and recommended to RISC that current recommended values for Forest and Open Space be continued at same rate. RISC voted to accept those recommendations. Another meeting to discuss Farm values will be held on February 23.

B. Strategic Planning/Legislative Changes: First strategic planning session will be held on April 3 at 11:00.

C. New Engineering Position: Discussed in IV, C, above.

D. ERICD Board Status: A prospective Board member is expected to submit required signatures in March. Several other people have expressed an interest. Two terms expired in January and two more are due to expire in May.

VI. Reports:

A. Roger Williams University: Maria Mack, Gina DeMarco, Kate Bousquet, Jessica Blackledge, Bev Migliore and Melissa Hayden addressed two Sustainability classes at RWU to discuss Districts and possible internship opportunities. Several students have contacted both the Districts and DEM to begin working on projects. Another meeting with professor will be scheduled to follow-up.

B. Districts: All three Districts distributed written reports in advance of meeting.

C. NRCS: Written report distributed.

1. PL 566 funding available and RI NRCS will prioritize Pocasset watershed plan which will be eligible for funding.

2. There is potential participation in the RCPP funded Long Island Sound Initiative for SRICD.

3. Of \$3 million obligated for EQIP in RI, \$1.5 million is for oyster restoration.

D. Statewide Planning: Work plan for next year is in development and will seek to make connection between agriculture and economic development.

E. R C & D: Coverts workshop will be held in May and work continues on Small Scale Forestry agreement.

A motion to adjourn was made at 12:10 by Paul Dolan, seconded by Ken Ayars. Motion carried unanimously.